

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Plays:

Socrates (1930)
The Venetian (1931)
The Rose Without a Thorn (1932)
Twelve Short Plays (1932)
The Buddha (1947)

Novels:

Time with a Gift of Tears (1943)

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Evenings in Albany (1942)
Rosemary for Remembrance (1948)

Travel:

Highways and Byways in Essex (1939)

SOME
I KNEW WELL

by

CLIFFORD BAX

With sixteen photographs



PHOENIX HOUSE LIMITED
LONDON

To James Bridie

If grocers lose their earlier fire,
Why should not authors, too, retire?
But not my Bridie! No,—not he
Who captivates the world and me.

Alas, he 'retired' 29 January 1951

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CONTENTS

Introduction and Thanks	7
1. James Agate: Critic and Diarist	9
2. Stephen Phillips: Poetic Dramatist	17
3. Havelock Ellis: Humanist	30
4. Gordon Bottomley: Poet and Dramatist	36
5. Aleister Crowley: Black Magician	51
6. Arnold Bennett: Novelist-Reporter	56
7. W. H. Davies: the Super Tramp	64
8. The Fastidious 'Nineties: Rhys and Symons	69
9. Æ: the Strayed Angel	77
10. W. B. Yeats: Chameleon of Genius	97
11. Stage Folk	105
12. C. B. Fry: All-Rounder	110
13. Call No Man Great	115
14. Graham Robertson: Letter-Writer	127
15. The Realms of Gold	132
16. 'We are the Music-makers'	142
17. E. V. Lucas: Essayist and Biographer	149
18. Leon M. Lion: Theatre-man and Friend	155
19. Allan Bennett: Chemist and Saint	161
20. An Author's Eleven	168
21. Edward Thomas: Critic and Poet	177
Index	189

PR
105
B242

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. James Agate	<i>facing p.</i> 16
2. Stephen Phillips	17
3. Havelock Ellis	32
4. Gordon Bottomley	33
5. Aleister Crowley	48
6. Arnold Bennett	49
7. W. H. Davies	64
8. Ernest Rhys	65
9. Æ (George Russell)	96
10. W. B. Yeats	97
11. C. B. Fry	112
12. Gustav Holst	113
13. E. V. Lucas	160
14. Leon M. Lion	161
15. Allan Bennett	176
16. Edward Thomas	177

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Introduction and Thanks

SOMEONE MAY notice in the following pages an absence of those defensive phrases 'I think' and 'is perhaps'. Once our attention is caught by them when we are reading an essay, a review, or a book, they become as irritating as gnats by a summer stream. Suppose a man to write 'Michelangelo's work is, perhaps, over-masculine', or 'Yeats and Æ are, I think, likely to be read in another fifty years'; we know that these are merely the writer's opinions, and it is obvious that he ought not to set down something which he does not 'think'. We can also assume that he is aware of his own fallibility.

Few generations are proud of the art and literature which they themselves produce. As a rule, each generation believes that the day of great men is over. For persons who were middle-aged in 1840, real poetry ceased with Byron; for their sons, no more poetry of high value seemed possible in view of Tennyson's great achievement; and after another thirty years (say, in 1900), readers once more felt that they had to nourish their brains on the 'lean kine'. We ourselves have better reason for suspecting that few contemporary writers will 'live' for long, but we can at least hope that, like our ancestors, we are mistaken. Still, two world-wide wars have shaken the lives of everyone who is now either forty or yet more ancient; and, in spite of Ruskin's contention that war begets great art, we who have existed through those furious years may know better than he did. Eric Gillett, a little while ago, commented on the tone of self-pity which prevails in the typical verse-work of the inter-war period. The young versemen of those two decades might have felt, with much reason, that war is a nightmare interruption of civilized interests, and that they could have written better in the long summer of Victoria's age. It is probably true, and if our literary bequest to posterity proves to be meagre, the reason will be that violent days externalize our attention. To savour poetry, or any

fine literature, we must be able to indulge the meditative mood. True, as a fire-watcher I would sometimes take a look at the man who was then inhabiting my present rooms, and find him, during the fiercest bombardment, playing patience, but he must have attained to an exceptional serenity. Even he was not reading poetry.

My thanks are due to Mr Frederick Muller for permission to use the essay on *Æ*. They are also due to Mr Greville Poke, editor of *Everybody's Weekly*, for permission to reprint the first part of the essay on Stephen Phillips. They are again due to the poet's son, who gave me invaluable information about his father's career. Phillips, like William Watson, was so suddenly 'dropped' that, when I was asked to write this paper, I found that I knew almost nothing about Phillips except his work; and to-day I meet young writers of lively intelligence who have never even heard his name.

I. JAMES AGATE

Critic & Diarist



I. A. B. WALKLEY, famous for many years as the elegant play-critic on *The Times*, once wrote in a letter 'Some American journalist has just referred to me as "the great dramatic critic"'. I did not know that such a being could exist'. James Agate regarded play-criticism as a high calling, for he would quote with awe long passages from C. E. Montague and William Hazlitt.

Like so many Mancunians he built up a big reputation upon a humble basis. In early days he was 'selling lengths of material' in a draper's shop; and yet in middle life he had become the most feared, most knowledgeable, and most readable of London's 'dritics'—a portmanteau word which amused him.

Few men have so sensitively appreciated the art of acting. This he showed over and over again, but never more finely or in a nobler mood than in his obituary of Ion Swinley. Consider this passage: 'He was a poet as well as a player and intensely interested in the speaking of verse, which he did beautifully. As an actor he was generous-minded and easy to play with. He could not wear modern dress, but costume became him perfectly. . . . Cheapness and commonness of thought could not live in Ion's presence. He thought nobly of the actor, and pursued the art of acting to the uttermost of body and spirit. There is a scale of values in which he was one of the most successful players of our time'. Or again: 'He had everything a romantic player should possess—looks, presence, and a noble resonant voice.

Girl, by the black stone god, I did not think
 You had the nature of a chambermaid,
 Who pries and fumbles in her lady's clothes
 With her red hands, or on her soily neck
 Stealthily hangs her lady's jewels or pearls. . . .
 If you would be a queen, cleanse yourself quickly
 Of menial fingering and servile thought.

Moreover, it was in a moment of true inspiration that the poet ended his grim play with a ribald song about a louse deserting the body as it grows cold, a vile ditty sung by two women as they wash the corpse and wrangle over their perquisites.

VI. These two plays were not only performed at the Old Vic by strong companies (Sybil Thorndike as Gruach, Malcolm Keen as Macbeth), but were also much praised. *The Saturday Review*, usually a supercilious paper, said in January 1922: 'We would ask of him an attempt to achieve in a larger plan than he has yet given us something of the Elizabethan compass, having so assuredly taught us that he is capable of the Elizabethan quality. Of whom else would it not be a folly and a heartbreaking to ask it?' Other critics were equally enthusiastic. And yet Gordon Bottomley made no effort to follow up his triumph. On the contrary, he was soon proclaiming that the normal theatre was an utterly worthless institution. 'Agate and Walkley,' he said, 'seem to me the greatest nuisances because more people listen to them, and they are definitely reactionary. . . . In the case of *Gruach* it is tiresome, for theatre-people who weren't there assume by the Sunday papers that the play was a failure, and this is going to hamper my getting more performances in England. . . .' At another time he exclaims, 'I don't mind Agate: his vivid conceit and bright journalistic pen are his only assets, and he can be trusted to go on disqualifying himself before all men of judgment. . . . Darlington I mind rather more, because I once had occasion to



5. Aleister Crowley

quial prose-technique which was all it had. Then everybody told me that it was my fault, and that I was just another of the poets who didn't know how to write for the theatre.'

He was happy in the local success of his little misty poems, but it may have been a 'defence mechanism' which caused him to retreat into an amateurish byway when he found that he could not complete his half-victory over the West End Theatre.

MEMORIES

The Past goes glittering through my imagination—
Scenes in old empires European and Asian,
Nor only a pageant of armies, or kings and queens,
But humble happiness and quiet scenes.

Almost I hear those mournful Egyptian ditties
And taste of life in Grecian or Chinese cities
Or in a Tuscan hill-town, savouring each
As a man distinguishes apple and pear and peach.

Little things known in childhood haunt us for ever;
And someday, should I remember our century's fever,
I may see glimpses of life as it is, and yet
Not Churchill or Munich's violent marionette.

Imagination will waft to me then, it may be,
A sense of some fair girl serene with her baby;
A crowd at Kennington Oval, dodging the showers;
Music long lost; or a friend arranging her flowers.

5. ALEISTER CROWLEY

Black Magician



I. WHEN A NEWSPAPER called him 'The Wickedest Man in the World', Crowley must have been intensely gratified, for he felt that he was a genius and he so hungered for fame that, as it eluded him throughout his life, he welcomed notoriety. He may, in fact, have been a near-genius, for certainly he had a strong intellect and a powerful will-to-creation.

In the winter of 1904 I went to St Moritz in Switzerland, not so much for the sports as for the gaining of better health. Owing to Yeats' essay on Magic, I had begun to examine the subject, and for this reason had taken with me a History of the Rosicrucians. The fashionable visitors to the Kulm Hotel may not have noticed a 'hyper-æsthetical, super-poetical, out-of-the-way young man' who was then eighteen, but they were startled one evening by the appearance of a dark, formidable man who was then thirty-three. The new visitor wore a velvet coat with ermine lapels, silk knee-breeches, and shoes with brilliant buckles. He smoked an enormous meerschaum pipe. The amusement of the others was equalled by Crowley's obvious distaste and contempt for them.

Presently the dinner-gong sounded, and I, laying the Rosicrucians face-downward in my wicker chair, went, as an earnest Tolstoyan, to eat a few lettuce-leaves and a snippet of cheese. My beverage, of course, was water. When I returned to the lounge and took up the Rosicrucians I saw with astonishment a magical symbol pencilled in the margin. Half an hour

later I strolled into a vast ballroom. Scores of gilt chairs lined the walls, but two of them had been placed in the middle of the room and Aleister Crowley was lying across them on his stomach. On the floor in front of him lay a vellum-bound volume which proved to be one of his own works. 'It is,' he said, 'a treatise on ceremonial magic. You are interested in the Rosicrucians—and what do you suppose the morons in this hotel would make of *that*? But let me advise you. Don't *read* about magic. Experiment! Attempt the Great Work!'

The 'morons', I learned, called Crowley 'the poet' and me 'the minor poet'. Of course I was curious to learn something about so eccentric a man, and asked the receptionist who he might be. She said, 'He has signed the book as "Lord Lockety", but he wishes his title to be kept secret. He desires to be known as Mr Aleister Crowley from Scotland'. The other visitors very soon modified their amusement over Crowley's costume, for they discovered that he was by far the finest skater in the hotel. They also learned that he had a considerable reputation as a mountaineer, and that he was acquainted with several difficult oriental languages.

And every evening he and I played chess. At eighteen a chess-player should be almost at his best, and so it was with me; but I have never met so strong an opponent. If I won two games, Crowley must have won twelve. You could sense the power of his mind as he pondered a move. After one of his victories he told me that he would soon be founding a new world-religion. 'What is the date at this moment?' he asked abruptly. I told him. 'And,' he said, 'in a hundred years from this day the world will be sitting in the sunset of Crowley-anity.' He seemed to me a dangerous man, as indeed at one time he was, for he induced his disciples to experiment with drugs, and so, when he offered me a set of his works in exchange for my address, I contrived to get out of the bargain.

II. For several years I did not see him again but, like everybody else, I heard much about him: as, for instance, that he had founded Crowley-anity in a huge basement somewhere in Bloomsbury or Chelsea, and that a deep-toned Tibetan bell hung suspended from the roof. He would give it a tap, and the sound, with overtones, would continue for quite a minute. After this, having exhorted his disciples that 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole Law', he took up a wafer, cut himself, dipped the wafer in his blood, and then consumed it. When the ritual was over, he interviewed in a back room candidates for initiation in the new religion. 'What do you seek, my child?' he said to one pretty young woman. 'Wisdom,' she answered, a little dubiously. 'If you have thirty pounds,' replied the Master, 'you may attain wisdom. For that sum I will send you a complete set of my books': but the pretty young woman, an artist, had not three pounds in the world.

Some of the legends about Crowley were not credible. Did he hang his wife by her heels in a cupboard? Did he drape her bedroom with black curtains when she thought herself to be pregnant, and did he do so in the queer hope of having begotten a black baby? We do know that he started an 'Abbey of Thelema' in some part of Sicily, and that its basic rule was 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law'; but the phrase can be misleading, for what he really meant was, 'When you have willed a deed, execute it'. A painter-friend of mine visited Sicily, and I asked him to find out what Crowley was doing. While he waited on the railway platform at Palermo, on his return journey, he met a Sicilian acquaintance, and asked him, 'Is it true that Crowley when performing his ceremony places four naked girls at the points of the compass?' The Sicilian shouted to a porter at the other end of the platform, 'E vero che'l Signor Caroli . . .' etc. 'Si, si,' shouted the porter. There was also a wild rumour that Signor Caroli had killed a young Englishman who had joined his Abbey. Years later Meum

Stewart and Leslie Blanche, that brilliant artist, told me that their education was far from finished until they met the Worst Man in the World: so, naturally, I invited him and them to dinner, at the Royal Automobile Club. At the last moment, as it were, Lady (Frieda) Harris joined us. In order to excite Crowley I introduced Mrs Blanche as 'la Comtesse de Roussy de Sales', but he was not deceived, and out of that meeting came the fine collaboration in *The Tarot Cards*, of Crowley and Lady Harris. It was on this occasion that Meum Stewart, in her direct manner, asked the magician about the death of the luckless young man. Crowley, quite unabashed, told us that the man had run into a spiked railing at Oxford or Cambridge, after a happy evening, and had so severely injured himself that, as Crowley said, 'I could not save him, and indeed when he came to my Abbey I had a mountain of trouble with the Sicilian police about his death'.

It may not even be true that he named his son 'Mustapha' because the mother, hoping for a daughter, had exclaimed, 'I must 'ave 'er': but Crowley had humour and wit, and the tale is well in character. I last saw him when he invited me to lunch, and certainly he provided the most delicious curry, cooked by himself, which I have tasted. At one time he published an occasional magazine, and in one issue there was a picture of a woman violinist as *The Queen of Heaven*. At the curry-lunch I asked him, 'What has happened to the Queen of Heaven?' He answered, 'Year and name, please,' and it seemed obvious that the title was not permanent—perhaps even annual?

At the end of his disappointing career, he took rooms in Hastings, partly because Hastings is our metropolis of chess; and when he was approaching death, which he would not have feared at all, he said to Louis Wilkinson, 'This is a good world to leave'. We are mistaken if we think of Crowley as a mere mountebank. If his verse, powerfully influenced by Swinburne and Browning, had been acclaimed, he would not have courted

notoriety, as when, during a season of the passionate *Sicilian Players*, he advertised outside the theatre, 'Read Aleister Crowley! He writes as the Sicilians act!'

To those of us who cannot understand his book about the Tarot, or his many excursions into the occult, he may still seem likely to leave a name as a satirical epigrammatist.

DAVID AND GOLIATH

Humiliating astronomer!

I am 'the merest midge', you say;
And yet you find me, honoured sir,
Puzzling about the Milky Way.

We 'midges' on our midget sphere
May photograph and, after, scan
A comet in its fierce career . . .
What comet photographs a man?



14. *Leon M. Lion*

19. ALLAN BENNETT

*Chemist and Saint**



I. I HAVE SPOKEN of Allan Bennett as the most beautiful personality I have known. He would not have liked the word 'personality', for he held that our seemingly separate selves are illusory and that egotism is the Great Heresy.

He was born in the early eighteen-seventies, and I always understood that he began life in either Manchester or Liverpool. It is difficult to be precise about a man who felt that to talk about himself was to waste time. For example, he would probably say at this point, 'What does it matter, my friend, where I was born? I am just a bundle of ever-changing emotional and intellectual forces, as everyone else is, and, ever-changing, they have been "born" many times in many places'. It is at least certain that he became an analytical chemist and that the bent of his mind was scientific. Indeed, there was little or nothing of the artist in him, and he might have been a happier man if he had been able to love what is beautiful in the world.

At an early age he made a deep study of Madame Blavatsky's theosophy, and was also at one time a member of that Order of the Golden Dawn to which Yeats and Crowley belonged; but he was not attracted by ceremonial magic, and was inclined to smile at the thought of magicians. Once, when he was staying with Crowley at the latter's house in Scotland, the two friends were sitting on a veranda and saw a phantom slowly pass in front of them. 'Some astral stray, I suppose,' said Bennett, and

* My thanks are due, and are tendered, to Dr Edward Greenly, who sent me his article, 'Ananda Metteyya: Some Reminiscences'.

then told how Crowley, incensed by a butcher's bill, drew a magical symbol at the bottom of it, with the result that on the following day the butcher severely cut his left hand. 'Crowley might have added much to the bettering of the world,' commented my friend, 'but he took the wrong turning'.

His examination of theosophy led him into the deep forest of Buddhism and, when his health began to fail, he was glad of an excuse for emigrating to Ceylon. Here he openly avowed himself a Buddhist, 'the first European,' thinks Dr Greenly, 'to do so'. A lady had recently founded a college for girls at Rangoon, and now wanted to find someone who should teach them the elements of physical science. She engaged Bennett for the post, and in this way he began his long sojourn in Burma.

More and more impressed by the profundity of the Buddha's discoveries, he thought that a mission to the West might save the world much suffering, and in order to go forth as a missionary he took the Yellow Robe and, according to ancient custom, assumed a different name. The name that he chose, or that was bestowed upon him, was Ananda Metteyya, but he usually shortened it to Ananda M., 'because,' he said, 'Metteyya is said to be the name of the next Buddha who will come into the world'.

The difficulty was to raise money for his project. However, one day (I quote from Dr Greenly) a Burmese came to Ananda and said, 'Many years ago a man owed my father a heavy debt. After a long time this man said, "I am unable to pay you the money, but I possess a magnificent ruby. Please accept it in discharge of my debt". In due time,' continued the Burmese sympathizer, 'the ruby came into my possession, but as I have plenty to live upon, I do not need it, and now I should like to devote it to the financing of your mission'. This looked like a wonderful windfall, for the ruby was of very great size. Indeed, it was so large that the two friends decided to sell it in London—at that time a city of vast wealth.

The monk, with a few lay-disciples, arrived in London on a

day of April in 1908. Dr Greenly reports that the missionaries occupied a small suburban house in which no woman—meaning no housekeeper or domestic—was allowed to stay at night. We also learn that 'it is laid down in the ancient *Vinaya* that a member of the Order must not ride on or behind a horse, that being a practice of kings and such like worldly persons'. Even the unworldly missionaries realized that a man in a brilliant yellow robe would not be able to walk happily about the London streets, but fortunately taxi-cabs had now come into our lives, and although a monk might not sit behind a horse, he did not offend the ancient law if he sat behind a measure of 'horse-power'.

During this mission in 1908 I first saw Ananda. He read a discourse upon Buddhism in a lodge of the Theosophical Society, and in his yellow robe he looked (as he was) ascetic, noble, and dignified. The basic difference between Theosophy and Buddhism is that the former holds to the Brahministic doctrine of the *atma* (the word atom is said to be a derivative)—that is to say, an eternal unchanging quintessential self in everyone—whereas Buddhism maintains the *Anatta* (no-atma) doctrine. Nothing is harder for the mind of a Westerner than to regard his apparent individuality as the last illusion, and it may have been for this reason that Ananda Metteyya's mission made few converts.

The mission ended in October and, the expense having to be met, one of the party took the ruby to a world-famous London jeweller. The jeweller gazed at it with awe, then took it away for testing. When he returned, he said, 'My dear sir, unfortunately this object is only a piece of red glass'. The expenses were ultimately paid by subscriptions, headed by Mrs Greenly. We may assume that the swindler was the man who had been unable to pay off his 'heavy debt'. Later in life, Bennett endured another disappointment. In co-operation with a fellow-chemist, he perfected a gramophone which would work on a tape instead of a disc. In this way a record of any length could be made; but when the friends went to patent their invention they

found that a similar machine had been patented some fifteen years earlier. The gramophone companies had bought out the inventor in order not to scrap their existing stocks.

II. Ten years went by before I again saw the Buddhist monk. Battiscombe Gunn, who became Professor of Egyptology at Oxford, had been so much impressed by him that he arranged a meeting.

Ananda M. had come here on a second mission. At one of his discourses I took the chair, and at the end of it I admitted that I had difficulty in accepting the Anatta Doctrine. An ardent (Western) disciple exclaimed that the only obstacle was the passionate individualism of the European mind. 'No,' interrupted the monk, 'remember that this conception is so hard to grasp that the Buddha himself hesitated to advance it, knowing that it would seem incredible to most people'.

By this time he was a very sick man. Twenty years in the East had affected his liver, and he also endured the misery of asthma. Once I asked him whether he could not regain his health if he were to rise through intense meditation into one of the more powerful states of the soul. 'Perhaps,' he answered, 'but if I succeeded, I should only transfer my bad *karma* to the mind. I prefer to work it out in my body!'

He now lived (in such simplicity that his one luxury was an occasional packet of cigarettes) in a humble lodging-house in Battersea. It was managed by two middle-aged women, and whenever I visited Lavender Hill I could see that their lodger seemed to them a saint. 'Just like a saint, he is,' said one of them: 'never seen the like of it, I haven't.' Then she told me of the soldier who had collapsed with malaria, had been found by Ananda M. as he went in search of cigarettes, had been laid upon the monk's bed, and presently, waking out of a coma, murmured, 'Where have I been? Was it paradise?'

During the winter of 1919 he read a series of papers on

Buddhism to a group of friends who foregathered in my Edwardes Square studio. Sometimes, having to climb many stairs in order to get to the studio, he arrived in so desperate a condition that, hurrying breathless into the kitchen, he could restore himself only by an injection of heroin; and no man wanted it less or needed it more. These discourses were published (*The Wisdom of the Aryas*) in 1923 by Messrs Kegan Paul & Company, the House which has done so much to increase our understanding of Eastern philosophy and religion. The little book, though written in a somewhat cumbersome style, is as clear an exposition of Buddhism as any of which I am aware. The small audience, an odd mixture, listened intently to the doctrine of the Three Principles underlying all things; that nothing endures, that suffering is unavoidable, that there is no unchanging soul: and to 'the Four Noble Truths', that to exist is to suffer, that the cause of suffering is desire, that suffering can cease only if egotism is quenched, and that there are known methods of extirpating our inborn egotism. But the intentness of that audience was due to more than intellectual curiosity. While the Bhikku delivered his essays a mysterious sense of grandeur pervaded the room, making me understand how great a heightening of soul must have happened to those who spent some time with the noblest of all earth-visitants, the Christ and the Buddha. When I mentioned this experience to Ananda M., he answered, 'It is said to happen always if a priest is sincerely expounding the *Dhamma*. It has very little to do with the priest himself'. I remember, too, how he said that remembering a past life is almost nauseating, 'as though while eating a meal another is placed before you'.

Small though the book is, those were ample days, and *The Times Literary Supplement* honoured it with a review of more than a column in length. The critic obviously knew much about Buddhism, at least intellectually, and some of his criticisms are of unusual interest. After twenty-seven years it is startling to

read 'he finds us all in a deplorable and well-nigh hopeless state. We have been unable to conquer individualism, and therefore "the modern civilization of the Western world is of necessity self-doomed to destruction" '. After referring to 'our benighted West', the reviewer said, 'The cause of the malady is the ever-springing thirst and craving for life; and the curative régime is the intellectual perception that all things are impermanent, that there is an utter absence of any soul or self or substance. But the founder of Buddhism was hampered in his diagnosis, being an agnostic, not caring to decide all matters. . . . As an agnostic, again, he discouraged attempts to consider the mystery of Karma . . . the mystery of rebirth, the reaping as you have sown in previous existences'. He says a little later, and quite fairly, 'The slightest study of Buddhist psychology reveals to us that re-birth need not concern us at all. According to the doctrine how should it? We are now but so many series of phenomena without unity. Certain tendencies, aggregates, *skandhas*, mysteriously recombine to form new composite individualities. That is all'.

This review was in a fine tradition, for although the writer could not accept Buddhism he was neither flippant nor patronizing. Indeed, there is much truth in his criticism. Gautama does seem to have been more philosophical than religious; he made no appeal to the emotions, he did not demand 'faith' but recommended experiment; nor is it possible to deny that Buddhism is pessimistic. What we have to decide is whether any careful thinker can truly be optimistic. This reviewer may have tumbled into an old trap (littered with the bodies of Christian missionaries) when he stated that Gautama was an agnostic. Anyone who is brought up to believe in the Christian doctrine that God creates a new and everlasting soul to inhabit the body of each baby, is likely to think that the *Anatta* Doctrine implies that there is nothing 'immortal' in man: just as the missionaries assured us that Nirvana meant nothing-

ness, extinction. As I understand this deep philosophy, much of it based upon clairvoyance at a great height, Buddha taught that only in the sense that we are for ever changing is it true that we are not immortal. The changes themselves are a form of immortality. And although Nirvana means 'blown out', as a candle is blown out, it also means, according to Allan Bennett, that only our egotism, our sense of separateness, is extinguished. 'It is,' he said, 'like removing large clods of earth from a running stream.'

He died in March 1923, a month after the publication of his lectures.

GLIMPSES

How strange that we have hearts that beat
And memories that survive
Through fifty years, yet feel no awe
To find ourselves alive. . . .

In Buxton on a burning day
Beside an awning'd shop,
A nursemaid and a little boy
Saw hurrying people stop.

The Duke of York and his young bride
(She is Queen Mary now)
Drove past us, and the small boy learn'd
To doff his cap and bow. . . .

Then there's another burning day
When through a gabled street
Stole meadow-fragrance and the smell
Of farmyards, hot and sweet.

Oh, how we curtsied or uncapped,
We country lads and girls,
When the great Virgin Queen rode by
In pomp and silk and pearls.

more attractive because he belonged to the age of Cardinal Bembo rather than to our own time, and because he spoke the English language with a sure sense of its range and beauty.

SUMMER EVENING

You've scratched my Queen-Anne table? Pray,
Be glad you did so, since now ends
Another day at Lord's, a day
Shared with the truest of old friends.

What do I mean? That little scratch
Will always, like a haunting tune,
Remind me of a great Test Match
Fought on a royal day of June.

Look at this flap, and you'll perceive
An eighteenth century scratch (*just there*)
Made by a wigged and powdered Eve,
Perhaps, while wondering what to wear.

The wine-stain here was caused, no doubt,
By some flushed lordling when he stooped
To kiss the buds that blossomed out
When Harriette Wilson's bodice drooped.

That zig-zag shows me some irate
Bewhiskered mid-Victorian spouse;
And *this*, an undergraduate
In full Edwardian carouse.

So leave your mark; and long years hence
Someone who owns my table then
May catch a visionary sense
Of cricket and two happy men.



15. Allan Bennett